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ABSTRACT

The academic community in the United States for the most part has failed over the past decade to focus its attention on the preservation and improvement of the American public broadcasting system, either through institutionally cooperative, sponsored research or independently generated work. That public broadcasting research has been neglected because of the lack of a forum for its presentation, is shown in the results of a literature search: 60 examples of public broadcasting published articles, conference papers, and dissertations. Academic apathy has contributed to this situation, and by allowing academic voices to remain "quiet" on the subject of public broadcasting, scholars risk losing both the opportunity to discuss public broadcasting and the very medium itself as it was envisioned. (Two tables of data are included; 10 notes, 24 references, a 60-item bibliography of public broadcasting research, and a 19-item bibliography of Corporation for Public Broadcasting research are attached.) (RS)

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A Decade of Quiet: The Failure of Academic Research to Explore Public Broadcasting in the United States During the 1980s

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Abstract

Worldwide onslaughts on public broadcasting systems threaten a crucial element of the public sphere: public service broadcasting. The academic community in the US for the most part have failed over the past decade to focus their attention on the preservation and improvement of the US public broadcasting system, either through institutionally cooperative, sponsored research or independently generated work. This paper functions in three roles: 1) as a resource for the academic community, providing analysis and a bibliography of readily accessible scholarship on public broadcasting, 2) as evidence of the need for a publication forum, and 3) as a catalyst for change.

After presenting the results of a literature search which located 60 examples of public broadcasting published articles, conference papers, and dissertations, the authors assert that public broadcasting research has been neglected due to the lack of a forum for its presentation. After charging that academic apathy has contributed to this situation, the paper cautions that by allowing academic voices to remain "quiet" on the subject of public broadcasting, scholars risk to lose both the opportunity to discuss public broadcasting and the very medium itself as it was envisioned.

A Decade of Quiet:
The Failure of Academic Research to Explore
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> The intellectuals are about to be robbed of those public forums in which they could engage in their 'culture of critical discourse.' Their toe-hold on power is crumbling under their feet.
>
> Philip Elliott, 1982.

Elliott pragmatically questioned whether increasing concentration on new technologies in the information age would endanger and contribute to the "disappearance of the public sphere" in our society (1982, p. 569). Worldwide onslaughts upon public broadcasting systems in recent years, extending from "enhanced underwriting" directives by US governmental regulators to drives toward electronic media privatization across Europe, now threaten a crucial element of that public sphere: public service broadcasting.

The academic community in the United States--our "intellectuals"--for the most part have failed over the past decade to explore, that is, to focus their attention on the preservation and improvement of the US public broadcasting system, either through institutionally cooperative, sponsored research or independently generated work. We intend that this paper function in three roles: 1) as a resource for the academic community, providing analysis and a bibliography of readily

accessible scholarship on public broadcasting, 2) as evidence of the need for a publication forum, and 3) as a catalyst for change.

International attention has recently focused on public service broadcasting. The April 1989 issue of Media, Culture and Society highlighted "broadcasting and the public sphere," publishing work from the United States and Belgium as well as the United Kingdom (Sparks, 1989).[1] The special double issue in 1987 of Communication Research Trends on "the crisis in public service broadcasting" brought together summaries of "a variety of studies which analyze and debate the [sic] public service broadcasting as it faces an uncertain future" in Africa, Australia, France, India, Israel, Latin America, West Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States (McDonnell, 1987, p. 1). The issue's editor asserted that "the public service ideal still seems the only worthwhile alternative to the twin disasters of unconstrained commercialism and debilitating state control" (p.1).

This paper is a personal labor. Considering the current international focus on public service broadcasting, the authors found it a national embarrassment that the 1988 International Communication Association conference did not include a single panel on US public broadcasting. We have both focused our academic careers on public broadcasting: Susan Ivers, following seven years of independent production work, through the pursuit

of a master's degree in public broadcasting and doctoral work focusing on the relationship between independent producers and public television; and Charles Clift, through the directorship of the Public Broadcasting Management Master's Program at Ohio University since 1980. While reviewing academic public broadcasting literature over the past few years, both authors have observed a decrease in scholarly work on the subject.

US Public Broadcasting Scholarship: 1980-1988

In order to document our observations, we have compiled a public broadcasting bibliography covering the years 1980-1988 (see Appendix A). Publications, conference papers, and dissertations focusing on US public broadcasting are included. Because we have chosen to focus on independently generated academic scholarship, the bibliography does not include the Corporation for Public Broadcasting's publications of CPB sponsored research (CPB documents from 1980-1988 available through ERIC are included in Appendix B).

To compile the bibliography, the following indices were consulted: Index to Journals in Communication Studies Through 1985, Communication Abstracts, Dissertation Abstracts International and ERIC.[2] Terms used for the computer searches included "public broadcasting," "public television," and "public radio." All references primarily related to "instructional" media were omitted. While our review of print indices include

the categories of "educational television" and "educational media," these references required a judgment call: if a citation primarily dealt with public broadcasting as it is commonly understood, it was included.

The primary factor for inclusion in the bibliography was accessibility, defined as ease of location and ready availability to the scholarly community. While we recognize the important contribution made by policy papers funded and distributed by foundations and other private organizations (i.e., The Markle and Benton Foundations, the Aspen Institute for Humanistic Studies' Program on Communication and Society, or PBS), these works were not considered by the authors to be readily accessible and therefore were not included. If an article appeared in two substantially differing published versions, both were included in the bibliography (see Powell & Friedkin, 1983 & 1986[3]).

Conference papers which were later published were considered to be more accessible in their published form and were therefore listed under their publication date. For example, while Willard Rowland presented his paper on "The Struggle for Self-Determination: Public Broadcasting, Policy Problems and Reform" at the 1980 meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism in Boston, Massachusetts, it appeared in print two years later in the Telecommunications Policy Handbook. Michael Woal presented his paper on "Program Interests of NPR Subaudiences" at the 1986 meeting of the Southern Speech

Communication Association in Houston, Texas, and it appeared later that year in Journalism Quarterly. Similarly, Paula Matabane and Oscar Gandy's paper "Through the Prism of Race and Controversy, Did Viewers Learn Anything from 'The Africans'"? presented at the 1987 meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication in San Antonio, Texas later appeared in the Journal of Black Studies in 1988.

Table 1 divides the total number of 60 references included in the bibliography by year and type (39 publications, 15 dissertations, and 6 separate conference papers or presentations). Our search revealed that no independently published books focusing on public broadcasting have been published during the decade of the 1980s. The "publications" column therefore includes only journal articles, chapters in anthologies, and one booklet (see Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987).

When compared to publication activity in the 1970s, the decrease in attention to public broadcasting scholarsip becomes apparent. Over its seven years of publication from mid 1973 to early 1980, the Public Telecommunications Review (PTR) included over 450 articles (Avery, et. al., 1980). When one adds the last three years of its predecessor, the Educational Broadcasting Review (EBR), over 600 articles appeared in the 1970s in the one journal compared to the 60 works we found published and presented in the 1980s. Table 1 lists the 1980s journal articles by year and type, and while there appeared to be a slight renewal of

Table 1

Public Broadcasting Research: 1980-1988

Year	Publications	Presentations	Dissertations	Total
1980	15	0	1	16
1981	1	0	3	4
1982	3	1	2	6
1983	1	0	1	2
1984	2	0	0	2
1985	3	0	2	5
1986	9	4	4	17
1987	3	1	1	5
1988	2	0	1	2
Total	39	6	15	60

interest in 1986, this disappeared in the following two years and pales in comparison to the average of over 60 articles per year in the previous decade in one publication alone.[4]

Journals containing more than one article on public broadcasting from 1980-1988 were the Journal of Communication (11),[5] Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media (7), Journalism Quarterly (4),[6] and Critical Studies in Mass Communication (2).[7] Single articles appeared in the Journal of Educational Television, Journal of the University Film and Video Association, Mass Communication Review Yearbook, and Media, Culture and Society.[8] Of note was the representation of four law journals with a single article each: Cornell Law Review, Journal of Arts Management and Law, University of Miami Law Review, and Vanderbilt Law Review. Other articles were written by academics in the disciplines of Afro-American studies (Matabane & Gandy,1988), political science (Mulcahy & Widoff, 1985), and the sociology of nonprofit institutions (Powell & Friedkin, 1983 & 1986).

The first conference paper related to public broadcasting listed through ERIC appeared in 1982. Conferences represented were the Association for Educational Communications and Technology, the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication, the International Conference on Culture and Communication, the Southern Speech Communication Association, and the Speech Communication Association. While participants at

additional conferences may have addressed public broadcasting, copies of such papers did not appear during our search, indicating that they were not made available to ERIC and therefore did not meet our accessibility criterion.

Of the fifteen dissertations included, twelve institutions granted terminal degrees focusing on public broadcasting.* The universities of Michigan, Wisconsin at Madison, and Wayne State granted two degrees each. Universities each granting a single degree were Harvard, Iowa, Oregon, Nebraska at Lincoln, North Texas State, Northern Illinois, Oklahoma, Syracuse, and Tennessee. To facilitate accessibility, dissertations are listed under the year they appeared in Dissertation Abstracts International, which may differ from the date of completion.

We were curious about the current activities of those who had received doctorate degrees focusing on public broadcasting. We consulted the National Faculty Directory 1989 and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting Directory 1988-89, yet only seven of the fifteen dissertation authors were located through either of the sources (see Table 2); the remaining eight are unaccounted for. The suspected loss of over half the recent public broadcasting scholars to the private sector is indicative of the trend we have documented in this paper--academics moving away from public broadcasting in their research, teaching, and discussion.

Table 2

Current Affiliations of Ph.D.s Whose Dissertations Concentrated on Public Broadcasting

Name & Affiliation	Dissertation Title	Year
Heather Birnie Manager, ITFS System WHWC-TV Madison, WI	Consideration of the commercial advertisement as a means of financing public radio and television: 1896-1986.	1986
James M. Haney Dept. of Communication University of Wisconsin Stevens Point, WI	A history of the merger of National Public Radio and the Association of Public Radio Stations.	1981
Sandra S. Harper Dept. of Communication McMurry College Abilene, TX	A content analysis of Public Broadcasting Service television programming.	1985

(table continues)

Joseph B. Kirkish Dept. of Communications Michigan State University Houghton, MI	A descriptive history of America's first national public radio network: National Public Radio, 1970 to 1974.	1980
Howard M. Kleiman Dept. of Communication Miami University Oxford, OH	Public broadcasting and free expression: An examination of the impact of the government NEXUS	1981
Mary S. Larson Dept of Communication Studies Northern Illinois University Dekald, IL	A content analysis of National Public Radio's "All Things Considered."	1985

(table continues)

Donald W. Peterson General Manager, KMOS-TV Central Missouri State University Warrensburg, MO	A model for the development and production of local programming at a public television station governed by an institution of higher education.	1988

Authors not located: Scroggins (1981), Cohen (1982), Mason (1982), Jackson (1983), Gellman-Buzin (1986), Hendrickson (1986), Hungerford (1986), & Mitchell (1988).

Sources: National Faculty Handbook 1989, CPB Directory 1988-89.

Four events in the twelve years of public broadcasting shaped the decline of academic involvement during the subsequent decade. First, funding of public television and radio stations was based on full-time operation, full-power transmission, and full-time professional staffs. Second, direct funding of research by the Corporation for Public Broadcasting declined. Third, there was a significant reduction in the activities of the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB), which for over fifty years had brought academics, non-commercial broadcasters, and, most importantly, non-commercial broadcasters working in academia together. And fourth, the Public Telecommunications Review ceased publication, which with its predecessors, the NAEB Journal and the Educational Broadcasting Review, had been a forum for research, criticism, and debate since 1957.

Prior to The Public Broadcasting Act of 1967, most university-licensed non-commercial broadcasting facilities were operated in conjunction with academic departments of radio-television. Faculty often served as managers, producers, and even engineers in addition to their teaching activities. The 1967 Act authorized the funding of public radio and television stations through the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. The Corporation in turn tied the direct support of stations, currently referred to as "community service grants," to full-time service by the stations and their managements. Public

broadcasting facilities began to move away from their academic homes, forming separate units within other branches of the universities. At Ohio University, the stations moved in the late 1960s from the academic unit into the division of regional higher education, which included continuing education and the university press operation. Butler University's public radio station, within the College of Fine Arts until 1987, is now administered under a newly created vice-presidency. Some universities have realized the public relations and community service value provided to the institution by public broadcasting stations. Yet such stations may not project the appropriate image with academic management and largely student-staffed operations. Left without interaction with public broadcasting at the local level, faculty have largely ignored the area in their teaching and research.

The Corporation for Public Broadcasting began funding communication research in the early 1970s. What began as less than $100,000 rose to a peak of over $760,000 in 1978, dropping off to about $470,000 in 1980. Since 1981 research expenditures have been listed within the CPB Annual Reports in combination with education, training, and activities other than program or station support (see CPB, 1978-1987). The funding of this category has fluctuated as a per-cent of CPB grants and allocations from 2.2% to 3.7% over the past decade, but according to Howard Myrick, past Director of Research for CPB, funding for

research continually declined after 1980 (personal communication, April 27, 1989).

Futhermore, when one examines the CPB Annual Reports over the past decade, the emphasis of research guided by traditionally commercial criteria is obvious. In the 1978 report research into the qualitative impact of television programs and programming of special interest to minority audiences was highlighted. This emphasis continued in the 1980 report, while measurement of national audience size and composition took on primary importance. The 1983 report began to emphasize technological along with audience research, and these focuses continued through the decade: the 1987 report cited a nationwide qualitative-impact survey of prime-time television, an Arbitron study of public radio listeners, and a study of the role of technology in instructional television. Current CPB funding is limited to a few relatively large research efforts, and the academic community has little access to this funding.

The National Association of Educational Broadcasters in cooperation with the University of Illinois and Ohio State University published the Public Telecommunications Review and its two predecessors. With the decline in station support for the organization as a whole, the PTR ceased publication in early 1980, and in 1981 NAEB was dissolved. This national organization, which since 1925 had combined scholarship and professionalism, became ineffective in the latter half of

the 1970s as more specialized institutions such as CPB, the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), National Public Radio (NPR) and various regional organizations performed many of its same functions. Yet as a director of one of those regional organizations observed, "when NAEB died our national, interregional forum died" (Virginia Fox, former President of the Southern Educational Communications Association, cited in Witherspoon & Kovitz, 1987). While the National Association of Public Television Stations (NAPTS) has taken on station support and lobbying efforts, no organization has truly taken on the role of providing a forum for discussion and focus on major themes.

Recommendations: The Need for a Public Broadcasting Forum

Originally, we had proposed the title of this paper to be "A Decade of Silence: The Failure of Academic Research to Explore Public Broadcasting in the 1980s," but we have made one or two changes. First, due to a little ethnocentricity on our part, we had always meant the focus of the work to be on US public broadcasting scholarship but did not make that limitation clear in our title. Our research pointed out a larger flaw in our original concept: how could we call the 1980s a "decade of silence" and still provide a bibliography containing 60 citations? We realized that in actuality we were suggesting a lack of focus or attention to the research that had been conducted: in essence, an atmosphere of "quiet" surrounding what

work had been done. We believe a forum is necessary to provide that focus and propose the creation of a public service broadcasting journal which will address issues facing public service broadcasting internationally as well as within the United States.

Mass communication research historians have charged that media researchers, by often hesitating to draw conclusions when conducting governmentally sponsored research, have served to frustrate officials and ultimately devalue and jeopardize future academic contributions to media discussions (Blumler, 1978; Reeves & Baughman, 1983; Rowland, 1983). Jay Blumler referred to the writings of former president of the International Association of Mass Communication Research, James Halloran, when making similar accusations. While Halloran recognized that, for a majority of scholars, "our main interest is to contribute to an important debate [and] to add to the public body of information," he realized that it must be "with no strings attached," since, as Blumler added, "the researcher's policy contributions must spring from what [Halloran] termed "an independent critical stance" (cited in Blumler, 1978, p. 224). In reference to European critical researchers, Blumler noted that they did not "want to be confined to ivory-tower academic quarters," and neither do their transatlantic counterparts (p. 224).

Yet as James Carey noted, while scholarship "flourishes when it stands in determined opposition to the established order

. . . you have to work very much harder to get a hearing at all" (cited in Halloran, 1981). Potential outlets through which scholars may affect public broadcasting do exist. Michael Tracey has placed several commentaries in the public broadcasting industry newspaper Current while serving as director of the Center for Mass Media Research, School of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Colorado at Boulder (1987 & 1989). University of Colorado Dean Willard Rowland's prolific policy analyses have appeared as both independent research articles (1982, 1986) and privately funded position papers (1986; Rowland & Tracey, 1988).[10] Through a graduate internship with the U.S. Congress House Subcommittee on Telecommunications and Finance, Susan Ivers was able to contribute to the formation of The Public Telecommunications Act of 1988 and later present her observations to both scholars and practitioners (see Ivers, 1989).

Academic institutions supportive of public broadcasting scholarship do exist: the University of Colorado at Boulder through its encouragement of research by Rowland and Tracey, the University of Wisconsin at Madison through the granting of dissertations (Jackson, 1983; Birnie, 1987) along with encouraging faculty and graduate student work (Haight & Vedro, 1982), and both Ohio State University and Ohio University through their master's programs in public broadcasting journalism and public broadcasting management respectively. Yet a contribution

cannot be made overnight, and, as Tracey suggested (referring to sporatically scheduled conferences), "it's going to take more than two-and-a-half days in a university seminar room" to make a difference (1989, p. 16). It will require the focus and opportunities for dialogue that an on-going publication can provide.

It the last decade such dialogue has not existed. It is our contention that many of our academic colleagues have dismissed public broadcasting as a viable research topic due to an attitude of indifference regarding its current form and function. Carey noted that "to attract and hold major scholars the field of communication must formulate puzzles and dilemmas that are intellectually challenging and provocative" (cited in Halloran, 1981). Infighting within the public broadcasting system over questions of funding may not make for provocative research, but we assert that the current challenges to the structure of public broadcasting and its very existence--within our own country as well as internationally--do.

Another reason for the lack of academic attention to public broadcasting may be, as Schweitzer pointed out, the fact that "article productivity" of mass communication scholars has been used to evaluate faculty for promotion and tenure (1989, p. 479). Perhaps those who might wish to pursue research on public broadcasting hesitate because of the risk tied to investing research energies without the existence of a

publication clearly supportive of the topic. While there are those who might argue that changes in political and economic forces are responsible, academic apathy has also contributed to the current shortage of potential outlets for public broadcasting scholarship.

Yet if we believe in the importance of accessibility to media, then we cannot question the need for public broadcasting itself to continue. The years have shown that "public broadcasting has traditionally been regarded as a major forum for a national cultural tradition" (McDonnell, 1987, p. 13). At the same time we can no longer question that public service broadcasting is in danger as criticism grows from all factions:

> Across the globe public broadcasting is being forced to come to terms with demands that it be much more entrepreneurial in spirit and give better 'value for money.' It is accused of giving its audience too much of what the broadcasters want and not enough of what the public demands (McDonnell, 1987, p. 1).

In the wake of the 20th anniversary of the term "public broadcasting" in the United States, pressure is increasingly brought to bear on public broadcasting here. Since the beginning of the decade federal and state governmental officials have pressured stations to create alternative fund-raising strategies such as enhanced program underwriting and profit producing station-sponsored enterprises. Individual stations themselves have recently banded together to transfer program funding authority from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting into their

own hands. It is both pertinent and realistic to question what structure and form US public broadcasting will take in the 1990s.

Changings occuring to public service broadcasting throughout the world call for a body of work which can provide information on an international level. Media, Culture and Society editor Colin Sparks found an example of US scholarship applicable to the current situation in his own country:

> It is in this context [institutional changes] that we publish Helen Katz's brief account of the problems facing US public service broadcasting. This has always been institutionally and financially marginal in its home market, and faces increasing problems in defining itself as anything other than the provider of worthy material which can find no outlet in the mainstream. It is clear that this role is one of the possible futures facing the diminished public service institutions in the UK (1989, p. 134).

Instances of such international comparisons are embarrassingly rare. Perhaps, as McDonnell suggested, "combined research approaches" to public service broadcasting are called for that could include:

> . . . cultural analysis which probes the values held by the public regarding public service broadcasting, [along with] political analysis exploring the power relations sustaining broadcasting policies and historical research into the ideological and cultural foundations of present-day broadcasting institutions (McDonnell, 1987, p. 13).

By neglecting critical public broadcasting research in our own country, we have done a disservice to our international colleagues by providing little historical evidence and insight into recent developments in our own public service broadcasting situation.

In closing, we would remind our colleagues of Elliott's warning used to introduce this paper. As McDonnell suggested, "the intellectual poverty of this debate about [public service] broadcasting's future should be a challenge to researchers to help broaden and deepen the policy discussion" (1987, p. 13). Yet by our very apathy we may indeed be contributing to the "crumbling" of that element of the public sphere called public broadcasting. We respectfully offer the caution that by allowing the academic voice to remain "quiet" on the subject of public broadcasting, without the focus and forum for dialogue that an on-going publication could provide, academia is risking a great deal. As McDonnell noted, "researchers [could] help build a potentially more rational basis for public policy discussions in the broadcasting arena" (1987, p. 13). Yet, by allowing ourselves to be robbed of a forum to discuss public broadcasting in our own country, we risk allowing both our nation and ourselves to be robbed of the very medium itself as it was envisioned.

Notes

1. While the narrative of this paper cites articles which have appeared in 1989, the bibliography in Appendix A covers the years 1980 to 1988. Writings on public service broadcasting from 1989 are therefore listed only in the references section of this paper; all other public broadcasting research cited appears in the bibliography contained in Appendix A.

2. Computer databases for DAI and ERIC were consulted for 1980-1988; print issues of DAI, CIJE, and RIE were consulted for 1989 (January through the most recent issue available).

3. The references to specific public broadcasting research included in our bibilography are located in Appendix A.

4. While some articles published in EBR and PTR focused on commercial or instructional broadcasting, the difference is still striking.

5. Ten of the eleven Journal of Communication articles appeared in the same issue: Summer 1980. The eleventh article related a certain aspect of public television programming to that offered by three cable networks (see Waterman, 1986).

6. Of the three citations listed for Journalism Quarterly, one was a "research in brief" item and another compared an aspect of public television to cable national services. While another JQ article was categorized in Communication Abstracts under "public television," it actually compared public affairs television to general or entertainment television, and so was not included (see Hofstetter, C. R. and Buss, T.F; (1981); Motivation for viewing two types of TV programs; Journalism Quarterly, 58(1)Spring: 99-103.

7. Critical Studies in Mass Communication began publication in 1984.

8. While both the Journal of Educational Television and Media, Culture and Society are British publications, the articles cited were in both cases written by US scholars and dealt with US public television (Atwater, 1986) or radio (Barlow, 1988).

9. Fourteen were doctorate of philosophy (Ph.D.) degrees, one a doctorate of education (Ed.D.).

10. We liken the activities of Rowland and Tracey to what could be referred to as a "British model of academic involvement in media," such as Raymond Williams' service with the British

national Arts Council or Nicholas Garnham's work with the Greater London Council while at the same time publishing in the Listener and maintaining their university affiliations. Some would argue that cultural differences between our two societies prohibit similar activities here, but we suggest that such complementary pursuits are indeed possible.

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Appendix A

Public Broadcasting Research, 1980-1988

1980

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Appendix B

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